

Last week, after four days spent if not under a volcano,
then let's say somewhere in the foothills,
I awoke feeling pretty good,
knowing there would be no need for a drink,
and came upon a couple of unopened manilla envelopes,
manuscripts returned from magazines.
Now, again, to appreciate this you must understand
that those envelopes are to me what the Consul's wife
was to him: I live for them, I have sacrificed
important segments of my own life and the lives
of my loved ones to those seemingly innocuous manilla
envelopes.
Yet I could not remember having taken them from the
mailbox or having tossed them aside.

There are some books you would rather admire than live.

MASTER OF ARTS

After the seminar he comes to me and asks,
"These other people in the class
all seem to have heard of these authors that you're
mentioning --
what are they, a bunch of bookworms or something?"

THE PROGRESS OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

My wife tells me that my daughter
who used to want to grow up
to be a writer and to work in a bookstore
has now decided to be a writer
and to own a bookstore.

THE BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES

i was asked once in an interview
what were my greatest fears.
i replied that, among other things,
i feared the return of my teenage acne.

now i have always believed in the power
of negative thinking -- that, by anticipating the
worst,
you can sort of ward it off.

but i may have to revise my theory,
because, sure enough, this fall
my high school acne did return.

i'm not exaggerating when i say
i just about had a nervous breakdown,
it wasn't just the physical embarrassment;
there was also the rush of buried humiliations
unleashed by the immediately re-familiar facial itch.

when i asked the dermatologist
what was causing the pustules,
he said, predictably enough, "acne."

"yes," i said, "i know that,
but what is the cause, after all these years,
of the acne?"

"most likely, strain," he said, "emotional upset,"
and he rushed from the room.

i didn't bother to point out to him
that circumstances and myself have always kept me
more or less under strain.
obviously "strain" is the new etiological smokescreen,
just as when i was a kid
it was chocolate or french fries.

well, while the acne lasted,
i was under considerable strain,
but, amazingly, the tetracycline worked,
proving that dermatological science is progressing
in its knowledge of cures, if not of causes.

a patch of blue scars, however,
though not overly distinguishable to the untrained eye,
does remain.

i suppose bukowski will accuse me now
of deliberately setting out to look like him.

TWO FOR THE SEESAW AND ONE FOR THE ROAD

If I'm over visiting my kids and want
something from the liquor store,
it's about fifty-fifty whether I'll go get it myself
or whether I'll ask my wife to run over for me,
except that as the evening gets later
and I get more mellow and settled in
the odds improve to about 10-1 that I'll send my wife.